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## Communication Professors' Study Finds Television's Christian Leaders Don't Lead

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*The University of Dayton*

*News Release*

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**COMMUNICATION PROFESSORS' STUDY FINDS  
TELEVISION'S CHRISTIAN LEADERS DON'T LEAD**

DAYTON, Ohio -- Christian leaders on prime time television offer very little in the way of depth, warmth or real leadership qualities, according to a study by two communication professors at the University of Dayton.

Thomas Skill and James D. Robinson, both associate professors of communication, analyzed how frequently Christian leaders appeared in fictional prime time television, how they behaved, lived their lives and carried out their duties.

The two professors analyzed 100 episodes, about 68 hours of prime-time television. They found few instances of the slick tele-evangelist, but found most often that Christian leaders were kept so far in the background that they displayed very few leadership or Christian qualities.

The study grew out of an earlier analysis of prime time television that showed religion is most often ignored as a force in people's lives. Skill said he and Robinson wanted to see how Christian leaders were presented in both their professional and personal lives and how they compared to other leaders and comparison characters. "We wanted to see if there was a pattern of presenting Christian leaders as Bible-thumping, somewhat shady snake oil

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salesmen," Skill said.

Surprisingly, they found that while Christian leaders were not portrayed in a harsh light, however, they weren't treated favorably either. Most often, religious leaders were one-dimensional leaders who had little to do with leading or religion.

Christian leaders were most frequently white, male, middle class and Catholic. In an analysis of the leaders' behavior, Robinson and Skill found that Christian leaders demonstrated slightly more favorable behaviors than Christian characters and comparison characters, but still found an "end justifies the means" rationale for Christian leaders engaged in lying, breaking and entering, or deceitful actions to accomplish something "good." Christian leaders were found to be no more generous or charitable than other characters.

Skill said they were interested in examining popular characterizations of Christian leaders at a time when leaders such as Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker were drawing controversy -- and in Bakker's case, a prison sentence.

While the behavior of Christian leaders was not "negatively characterized in any systematic fashion," the characters are often vague, "relatively bland and shallow."

On television at least, Christian leaders "rarely behave as Christians or exhibit a capacity for leadership," the study concluded.

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